

and Rescue Team answered their nation's call for help. Their work is not glamorous; they quite literally dug in, lifting away thousands of pounds of concrete and steel in the searing African sun. They labored in the face of danger, even switching hotels to evade the bombers, who were still at large. They labored in the face of horrific tragedy, but they never lost faith in their purpose.

Mr. Speaker, I know my colleagues join me in honoring the Urban Search and Rescue Team of the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. The men and women of Virginia Task Force One left their homes and families, traveling thousands of miles to represent the United States in a purely humanitarian mission. Their nobility of purpose and action was an honor to witness. I am proud to represent such heroic citizens.

STOPPING ABUSE OF MEDICARE LONG TERM CARE HOSPITAL PAYMENT SYSTEM

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 9, 1998

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I am introducing legislation today to close a loophole in the way Medicare pays long-term care hospitals—hospitals which treat people with severe problems and which have an average length of stay (ALOS) of more than 25 days.

Some so-called TEFRA hospitals establish extremely high patient costs in the first year or two of operation, which establishes the rate at which they will be paid under Medicare in future years. Once that rate is established, they immediately go to a much lower cost mix of patients, but get paid as if they still had a very sick, expensive patient caseload. The bill I am introducing would help curb this gaming of the system.

THE WORK OF CONGRESS

HON. LEE H. HAMILTON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 9, 1998

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to insert my Washington Report for Wednesday, August 19, 1998 into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

THE WORK OF CONGRESS

The work of Congress often seems laborious and painfully slow. We hear complaints about legislative stalemate, excessive partisanship, and the "do-nothing" Congress. Sometimes it is hard to discern good reasons for the inefficiencies and delays that occur. But often the difficulty of passing legislation stems from the very nature of our representative democracy and from our changing country and changing political climate. The work of Congress has become much more difficult over the past several years.

The job of Congress: Although the job of a Congressman involves several different roles, the main ones are as representative and legislator. As a representative, a Member serves as an agent for his constituents, ensuring that their views are heard in Congress and that they are treated fairly by federal bureaucrats and other public officials. As a leg-

islator, a Member participates in the law-making process by drafting bills and amendments, engaging in debate, and attempting to build the consensus necessary to address our nation's problems. Fulfilling these roles may sound easy, but can be enormously difficult.

Some things, it must be said, have helped to make the work more manageable in recent years. Congress has moved into the information age, as computers, faxes, and Internet access help Members communicate with citizens. Large numbers of congressional staff help Members respond to constituent mail and research legislation. The expansion of think tanks and public policy research helps provide lawmakers with detailed analysis of policy options.

Increased difficulty: However, the elaborate constitutional system of separated powers and checks and balances created by our founding fathers still requires that compromise and consensus occur for legislation to pass. This protects people from the tyranny of the majority, but also makes it difficult for Congress to act. Since I have been in Congress the job of a Congressman has become increasingly difficult, for several reasons:

First, the country has grown larger and more diverse. The population of the country has more than doubled since I was in high school. Each Member of the House now represents almost 600,000 constituents; almost 50% more than in the 1960s. Americans also vary more now in terms of occupation, race, religion, and national origin. The increasingly diverse background of constituents expands the range of interests and differences that must be reconciled to produce consensus on major issues.

Second, the issues have grown more numerous and more complex. Today's Congress tackles a host of topics that simply were not around a few decades ago, from campaign "soft money" and HMO's to cloning and cyberspace. Also, the issues we consider have become more technical and complicated. A recent environmental bill before Congress reminded me of my college chemistry textbook.

Third, the issues have also become more partisan. The policy agenda always has included divisive items, but in past years these divisions typically were not partisan. An individual you disagreed with on one issue likely would support your view on many other items, making it easier to strike bargains and achieve consensus. With the intensity of American politics today, issues often have a sharper, partisan flavor. Policy debates frequently split constituents and their elected representatives by party, making the two major parties resemble warring camps more than potential partners in compromise.

Fourth, there are more policy players in the legislative process. For instance, in the 1960s just a handful of major groups were actively involved in foreign policy making. Now there are literally hundreds, including the business and agriculture communities, nonprofits and public interest groups, labor unions, ethnic groups, and international organizations. The cast of important players has similarly expanded in the numerous other policy areas.

Fifth, although the workload of Congress has expanded, the number of hours in session in recent years has actually dropped. The leadership has chosen to have the House now work basically only 2½ day weeks, with many Members arriving in Washington on Tuesday afternoon and leaving for their districts on Thursday evening. As a result, Members have less time to know each other well and to work out their differences, thus making consensus-building even harder.

Sixth, the cost of campaigns has skyrocketed, driven largely by the cost of tele-

vision advertising. Members today must spend a disproportionate amount of time fundraising, which means less time with constituents discussing the issues and less time with colleagues forging legislation and monitoring federal bureaucrats. Also, special interest support may drive some Members to lock in their views earlier, reducing their flexibility and making compromise harder.

Seventh, the tone in Congress has changed dramatically over the past several years, with more partisan bickering and personal attacks, and less civility. That takes a significant toll. It poisons the atmosphere and complicates the efforts of Members to come together and pass legislation for the good of the country. In the end, Congress works through a process of give and take, which is far more difficult with strained relationships across the aisle.

Eighth, the media tend to favor the extreme views on any given issue, emphasizing the differences and downplaying the areas of agreement. That can polarize the issue and make agreement more difficult to reach.

Finally, public suspicion of politicians is greater today than it was in past decades. Americans have always had a healthy skepticism about government, but problems arise when they become cynical and have little trust in what their leaders say or do. It is difficult for Members of Congress to even discuss the issues with constituents when their character, values and motives are always suspect.

Conclusion: It is easy to criticize Congress. As Members are clearly aware, many criticisms of the institution are justified. But we need to get beyond that and recognize that certain perceived shortcomings of Congress are actually inherent features of any legislature in a large, diverse, and complicated country. Members of Congress need a certain degree of trust from their constituents if they are to fulfill their roles as representative and legislator—not unconditional trust, but support meshed with constructive skepticism and a reasonable understanding of the difficulties the institution confronts.

DEPARTMENTS OF COMMERCE, JUSTICE, AND STATE, AND JUDICIARY, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1999

SPEECH OF

HON. WILLIAM D. DELAHUNT

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, August 3, 1998

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 4276) making appropriations for the Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, the Judiciary, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1999, and for other purposes.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong support of the amendment, which would restore funding for the Legal Services Corporation to current levels.

The Legal Services Corporation is a lifeline for thousands of people with no other means of access to the legal system. Last year, LSC resolved 1.5 million civil cases, benefiting over four million indigent citizens from every country in America.

Who are these people? Over two-thirds are women, and most are mothers with children. Women seeking protection against abusive spouses. Children living in poverty and neglect. Elderly people threatened by eviction or